

Message Text

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FOR USDEL SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: SOVIET ACTIONS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

REF: (A) STATE 295721 (TOSEC 120122, (B) SECTO 12063

1. DURING MY DECEMBER 12 MEETING WITH GROMYKO I MADE THE TALKING POINTS SET FORTH IN REF A AS AMENDED BY REF B.

2. DURING A TWENTY MINUTE DISCUSSION GROMYKO MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

-- THERE WAS ONE "VERY GOOD THESIS" IN MY PRESENTATION: THE US HAD WARNED SIAD BARRE THAT THERE WAS NO POSSIBLE MILITARY SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM. "THIS IS TRUE AND WE SO WARNED SIAD BARRE WHEN HE WAS IN MOSCOW AND EVEN BEFORE THAT, AT THE VERY OUTSET OF THE CONFLICT WHEN THE WINDS OF WAR BEGAN TO BLOW."

-- THE MAIN DIFFERENCE IN US AND SOVIET POSITION ON THIS THESIS IS THAT MOSCOW STATES IT BOTH PRIVATELY AND IN PUBLIC WHEREAS TO THE BEST OF GROMYKO'S RECOLLECTION THE US HAS NOT PUBLICLY STATED THAT THE WAR SHOULD BE STOPPED, SOMALI TROOPS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN FROM ETHIOPIAN TERRITORY AND THAT A POLITICAL

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RESOLUTION SHOULD BE SOUGHT AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. IF THE US WOULD PUBLICLY ANNOUNCE SUCH A POSITION ITS INFLUENCE WOULD HAVE A TELLING EFFECT.

-- SOVIETS ARMS SUPPLY TO ETHIOPIA IS INSIGNIFICANT (NEZNACHITEL'NIY - SUKHEDREV TRANSLATED THIS AS "NOT CONSIDERABLE") ALTHOUGH WESTERN COMMENTATORS, ESPECIALLY IN THE US, EXAGGERATE

"TENS OF TIMES." SIMILARLY THE SOVIET AIRLIFT IS BY NO MEANS "HUGE" FOR IT IS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO AIRLIFT LARGE QUANTITIES OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT. ETHIOPIA WAS MUCH LARGER IN POPULATION AND SIZE THAN SOMALIA. YET IT WAS SOMALIA WHICH HAD INVADDED ETHIOPIA AND HAD ITS TROOPS IN ETHIOPIAN TERRITORY. HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED IF THE SOVIET UNION HAD SUPPLIED ETHIOPIA WITH "HUGE" AMOUNTS OF WEAPONS, OR EVEN WITH AS MUCH AS SOMALIA HAD?

-- HE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT US ARMS SUPPLY POLICY BUT WHEN MOSCOW SUPPLIES ARMS IT ATTACHES OFFICIAL PROVISION FORBIDDING THEIR USE AGAINST A THIRD COUNTRY; THEY MUST BE USED ONLY FOR SELF DEFENSE. SOMALIA, HOWEVER, HAD VIOLATED THIS AGREEMENT AND HAD INVADDED ETHIOPIA IN A MANNER OF WHICH THE US WAS WELL AWARE.

-- HE SEEMED TO DISCERN IN OUR PRESENTATION CONCERN OVER AN ALLEGED ETHIOPIAN THREAT TO INVADE SOMALIA. "AS FAR AS WE KNOW THAT IS TOTALLY EXCLUDED. WE TALKED ABOUT THAT AT A SUFFICIENTLY HIGH LEVEL WITH THE ETHIOPIANS. THEY DON'T HAVE ANY PLAN TO INVADE SOMALIA."

-- THE US AND USSR COULD COOPERATE PRODUCTIVELY BY THEIR JOINT ACTION TO BRING ABOUT AN END TO THE ARMED CONFLICT, THE WITHDRAWAL OF SOMALIAN TROOPS AND NEGOTIATION ON A PEACEFUL POLITICAL SOLUTION. IF WE COULD POOL OUR EFFORTS THIS WOULD BE A GOOD EXAMPLE OF US-SOVIET COOPERATION.

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-- THE USSR IS FAR BEHIND THE US IN ARMS SUPPLY. MOREOVER IN MANY CASES US SUPPLIED ARMS HAVE BEEN USED FOR PURPOSES WHICH WERE VERY REMOTE FROM DEFENSIVE.

-- ON DEC. 14 WE WILL BEGIN BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ON (CONVENTIONAL) ARMS SUPPLY TO THIRD COUNTRIES. IF WE COULD REACH A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE POSITION THIS WOULD INDEED BE A MAJOR STEP FORWARD WITH POSITIVE EFFECT ON OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS AND ON THE GENERAL WORLD SCENE.

3. IN RESPONSE I SAID:

-- IT WAS WRONG TO SAY THAT WE HAD MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE DESIRABILITY OF ENDING THE SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT. (GROMYKO INTERVENED TO INSIST THAT WE HAD NOT CALLED FOR WITHDRAWAL OF SOMALI TROOPS FROM ETHIOPIAN TERRITORY.)

-- WHEN THE SOMALIS HAD APPROACHED US FOR ARMS WE HAD MADE CLEAR THAT WE WOULD NOT PROVIDE THEM AS LONG AS THE PRESENT CONFLICT IN OGADEN LASTED.

-- WE HAVE STRICT PROVISION FOR ARMS SUPPLY PROHIBITING THE USE OF US SUPPLIED ARMS IN THIRD COUNTRIES. APPLYING THIS RULE TO PRESENT CASE, WE HAD SPECIFICALLY STIPULATED THAT US ORIGIN ARMS MUST NOT BE TRANSFERRED TO SOMALIA BY THIRD COUNTRIES.

-- AS TO THE RESOLUTION OF THIS CONFLICT I EMPHASIZED THAT THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES CONSIDERED THIS AN AFRICAN PROBLEM AND WANTED THE MAJOR POWERS TO DISENGAGE. WE SUPPORT THE OAU'S INITIATIVES AND IT WOULD BE USEFUL IF THE USSR DID TOO.

-- WHILE I WAS GLAD TO HEAR GROMYKO'S ASSERTION THAT SOVIET ARMS SUPPLY TO ETHIOPIAN WAS INSIGNIFICANT OR NOT CONSIDERABLE, THAT ASSERTION DID NOT SEEM TO MATCH OUR INFORMATION BUT I WOULD CERTAINLY REPORT IT TO WASHINGTON.

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-- I WAS GLAD TO HEAR THAT ETHIOPIA DID NOT WANT TO GO BEYOND ITS BORDERS. (GROMYKO INTERVENED TO SAY THAT EARLIER SIAD BARRE HAD VOICED HIS FEAR OF AN ETHIOPIAN INVASION TO THE SOVIETS WHO HAD IN TURN ASSURED HIM ON THE BASIS OF AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT BY MANGISTU THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF ATTACKING SOMALIA. SIAD BARRE KNOWS THIS TO BE TRUE, SAID GROMYKO, BUT CONTINUES HIS MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN IN FURTHERANCE OF HIS OWN GOALS.

-- I WOULD ALSO REPORT HIS SUGGESTION FOR US AND SOVIET ACTION TO ALLEVIATE THE SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT AND WE WOULD BE WILLING TO LISTEN TO SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS. MEANWHILE IT WOULD BE BEST FOR THE BIG POWERS TO STAY OUT AND LET THE OAU PLAY A MEDIATORY ROLE.

4. IN CLOSING GROMYKO SAID THE USSR WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT. ITS ONLY DESIRE WAS FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WHICH MIGHT BE OBSTRUCTED IF "SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS GET INVOLVED AND INVOLVE YOU."

5. COMMENT: I FIND GROMYKO'S REFERENCE TO THE UPCOMING CONVENTIONAL ARMS TALKS IN WASHINGTON RATHER INTRIGUING. WE HAD SUSPECTED THAT THE SOVIETS MIGHT BE RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS ARMS TRANSFERS IN THE HORN (SEPTEL) FOR FEAR THAT TO DO SO WOULD LIMIT THEIR POLICY OPTIONS IN THIS CONTESTED AREA. GROMYKO'S REMARKS MAY INDICATE OTHERWISE. BUT IF SOVS SHOULD BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE HORN, WE CAN BE SURE THEY WILL ALSO WISH TO DISCUSS IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, AND ISRAEL.
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